

Harrington and Hargrove by hoppnhorn

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: M/M

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-29

Updated: 2018-02-16

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:07:48

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 6

Words: 12,155

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Officer Steve Harrington and Officer Billy Hargrove are the two newest members of the Hawkins Police Department. Billy is impulsive, tough and can charm anything with a pulse. Steve tries to keep them both from getting suspended. As partners, they protect Hawkins from shoplifters, vandals, and monsters from alternate dimensions...but only on special occasions.

1. The Good Cop & The Bad Cop

Author's Note:

Yeah this was the last thing I needed to do. Start another harringrove fic. Bad, Rachel. Might be a fic that flows or it might end up being unconnected pieces. Not sure. Just fluffy nonsense, really.

“Remember last time?”

“Yes, I remember last time.”

“Hopper told you, last warning.”

“Jesus, what are you, my mother?”

“No, I’m your *partner*, you asshole.”

“You’re a fucking woman, is what you are. Can we do this—?”

“I’m not kidding, man. You gotta dial it back.”

“FINE. Shit.”

Steve pinched the bridge of his nose and let a deep sigh leak from his lungs. His day was only beginning and he could feel heartburn coming on. Somewhere between his morning coffee and his lunchtime turkey sandwich, he was going to have to stop and buy antacids. Again. When he opened his eyes, Billy was staring at him, brow askew in a look of *what the fuck is wrong with you*.

“Give me your gun, at least.” Steve muttered, eyeing the holster on Billy’s hip. Billy let out a snort and shook his head, putting a big finger in Steve’s face.

“You can fuck right off, Harrington.”

“I’m not the one with THREE reprimands in a month, idiot.” Was Steve’s grumbled response. “After that last kid, it smelled like piss in the interview room for weeks.”

“He put a rock through Mrs. Henderson’s window.” Billy stated matter-of-factly, leaning back in his chair. “Little shit deserved to sit in soaked pants for a day.”

Steve groaned, his chest burning. He should have skipped the coffee. Stuck to milk. Suddenly, a glass of water and some Tums were being dropped on his desk and Steve let out a whimper.

“Flo, you beautiful woman you.” He whispered, standing to peck the older lady on the cheek. She chuckled warmly and pat his face, giving Billy a side glance.

“You’re gonna need all the help you can get today. I can tell.”

“What nothing for me, sweetheart?” Billy’s arms were spread wide above his head, grin even wider. “I thought you were my girl!”

“Give Steve a break, Billy.” She laughed softly, rounding their joined desks to plant a little swat on his jaw.

“Nah, I like to keep him guessing.” Billy winked up at her, flashing his dazzling smile across the way at Steve. Steve rolled his eyes, unable to keep a soft laugh from escaping his lips.

“Come on, shithead.” Steve muttered, standing from his chair while he righted his shirt. He was still not used to the way he filled it out. But after months of lifting and going on morning runs, he’d finally started to rival Billy in strength. It had come in handy more than once when they’d been caught in a tough situation. Like wrestling drunks into the backseat of a cruiser. “Let’s go talk to him.”

“Thought you’d never ask, dear.” Billy shot from his seat, the rolling chair banging into the wall behind him.

“Oliver Lucas.” Steve stated the name coolly, reading from the piece of paper in his hands. He set it down on the table and tapped a finger on it. “Says here you have two previous offenses, Oliver.”

“Should have quit while you were behind, dumbass.” Billy snarled from somewhere over Steve’s right shoulder. He could picture the guy leaning in the corner of the room, expression set in a glare. Steve

cleared his throat and Billy shifted on the wall, but said nothing further. The warning was silent yet understood.

“You know what that means, don’t you?” Steve picked up, closing the manila folder. “It means I have to do something about you, Oliver.”

“Teach you what happens when you fuck up.” Billy growled.

Steve clenched a fist on the table and ground his molars. He needed more Tums. Like a whole bottle. When he looked across the table, he put on a calm smile.

“Do you have anything you’d like to say?”

Oliver trembled, his eyes flickering between Steve’s friendly face and Billy’s looming figure in the corner. The kid was only fourteen, with pimples and a mop of curly, black hair, the stuff sticking out from his head in every direction. He was practically whispering when he finally spoke.

“I swear, Mr. Harrington, I won’t do it again.”

“That’s OFFICER HARRINGTON.” Billy snapped, charging forward to slam a palm on the surface of the table. Steve watched the boy jump and tried not to enjoy the fear on the kid’s face. But his cheeks hurt from holding back a revealing smile and giving up the game. Beside him, Billy was glaring angrily; but it was all a show. There was no telltale flush on his skin, no crazy glint in his eye. Steve knew when his partner was off the tracks. This was not that. Playing bad cop was Billy’s favorite part of the job and he played the part well. Too well, Hopper would say. But Steve’s good cop was on point too.

“It’s alright.” Steve put out a hand, gently pushing Billy back from the table. He nodded to Oliver with an *I’m on your side* expression before he looked at Billy and gave him a subtle wink.

His partner’s eyes were sparkling with glee. Steve had to look away to keep from snorting with amusement.

“Oliver.” Steve gathered himself, clasp his palms together in front of him. “If you’re caught shoplifting again, I might not be able to keep someone from pressing charges.”

"Then you'll go to prison. Wanna go to prison, Oli?" Billy sneered from the corner and Oliver kept his eyes trained on Steve, his face going white.

"Please Officer Harrington, I swear, I won't even go in the place again."

"I'm not just talking about the Mini Mart." Steve poked the folder on the table with one finger. "You so much as steal a fork from a diner, I'll hear about it."

"Then you're toast, you little shit." Billy was leaning over the table again, hunched until the fabric of his uniform shirt was stretched to capacity across his shoulders. Steve simply stood, taking the folder with him. He slapped it gently on the metal table.

"Your mom will be here soon. But you remember what I said." Steve spoke evenly, trying his damn hardest not to laugh as Oliver shrunk away from Billy's glare. "Toe out of line..."

"...and I'll cut it off." Billy finished his sentence. Sort of. Steve almost groaned as he opened the door out into the hall, waiting to follow his partner out.

"You can't threaten to hurt him, jackass. Remember what I said about *dialing it back*?"

"Eh, who gives a shit? He's fine."

"ME. I give a shit. What if he tells his mom, huh?"

Billy fluttered his eyelashes at Steve from where he stood in the hall, a devious grin on his lips.

"Oh, I'll think of something to smooth her over."

Steve made a face and Billy's expression cracked into a full smile.

"You're gross." He snorted, walking back towards the Chief's office. "I'll go tell Hopper that Mrs. Lucas is on her way."

Billy's hand closed around Steve's shoulder and he stopped, turning as Billy stepped into his space.

"You wanna cut out early for lunch?" He asked softly, his cheeks slowly turning pink. Steve felt a mirroring blush rise to his own face, pulse rising.

"Sure."

Billy gave him a small nod and a little grin.

"I'll go finish up with Oliver."

"Billy—"

"Paperwork, Harrington." He clarified, hands raised as he backed down the hall. "Just paperwork."

"I already did it." Steve shot back. The cocky smile on Billy's face had Steve shaking his head. "But you knew that, right?"

"Dunno what you're talking about." Billy replied, turning on his heel. "I always do the paperwork."

2. Road Trip

Summary for the Chapter:

Billy and Steve draw the short straw for a weekend prison transfer. Bitching ensues.

They'd only been in the car for a half hour before Billy had started complaining.

"You don't smell that?" He grumbled for the second time, looking around the cruiser's cab while Steve shook his head at the wheel.

"I told you. You leave greasy takeout in here, it's going to smell like *greasy takeout*."

Billy sulked at that, rolling his eyes as he looked out the window. Steve let a grin slip onto his lips. The drive was only going to take a couple hours, but Billy was like a child. If it took longer than ten minutes, he was bored. Or antsy. Especially if he wasn't driving. Steve had learned a long time ago that, unless it was in hot pursuit of another driver, Billy should not be behind the wheel. At least his Camaro was a civilian car with civilian limits. Their cruiser had a bullbar. Billy and a bullbar did not mix.

"Have you heard from Max?" Steve asked, trying to distract them both from the endless road ahead. Billy sighed and sunk back into his seat. The little smile that formed filled Steve's chest with warmth.

"Yeah. She's majoring in some kind of science. Totally over my head but she loves it."

"She's a smart kid." Steve nodded. "I knew she had it in her."

"Yeah, me too." Billy murmured in agreement, dragging a finger over the glass of his window. Steve wondered sometimes if Billy called Max or if Max called Billy. Their family was a hard conversation to start, let alone navigate. Despite Billy's improvements, that part of his life was still a mine field. A mine field Steve didn't feel like stirring while trapped in a car bound for Indianapolis.

“Hey, can you crack a window back here? I’m sweating like a whore in church.” Their passenger bellowed from the backseat. Steve merely turned on the vents, the car filling with semi-fresh air. And more takeout smell.

“Christ, what did you **eat** in here?” Billy was groaning, waving a hand in front of his face. Steve let out a hard scoff.

“*Me?* You mean, we, right? Because I can’t seem to get a coffee without having to get one for you.”

“That’s called manners, Harrington.” Billy teased, letting his window down to let in cold, fresh air. They both quieted as the wind whipped around the cab, drowning out the silence.

From the corner of his eye, Steve watched Billy lean back in his seat and swallow, Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat. His partner had started growing a beard, dark hair sprouting on his chin and jawline, curling around his mouth and over his upper lip. No matter how long Steve went without a shave, the most he could manage was a slight goatee. Billy had him beat in that department. But Steve’s hair reigned supreme. At the academy, they’d both been required to cut their long locks, breaking their hearts in the process. When they got their badges, however, the game was on to see whose hair bounced back from “the Great Sheering”.

Steve had fully revived his mane after only a year. Billy’s golden mop of curls was still recovering. The mullet, however, was a casualty that many had been happy to see die. Steve would never say that he missed the hideous thing but, every once in a while, he’d look at Billy and try to remember it.

“Why’d we have to do the transferring, huh? We aren’t even the ones who want him.” Billy muttered, leaning his head back on the headrest.

“Because we’re the simple, small town bumpkins with nothing to do.” Steve teased and Billy snorted.

“I have plenty I could be doing.” He purred. Steve shook his head and avoided looking across the cabin.

"Me too." The voice from the backseat piped up. Steve glanced in the rearview mirror and smirked.

"Yeah? No one cares."

"Yeah, just shut the hell up, Marcus." Billy added, giving the caged barrier between the front and back seats a little knock. The metal rang and Steve rolled his eyes; his partner knew the sound made him crazy. Like a bell going off behind his head.

"Don't need to be a dick." Marcus grumbled, scowling at Billy through the grate. Lee Marcus was an older guy, dressed in the grey uniform from the Roane county jail, his long, blond hair wispy like down. Grey eyes narrowed up at Steve.

"If you think this is bad, you're going to have a hard time in the city prison." Steve snorted. "Officer Hargrove is being tame."

"Tame?" Billy scoffed. Steve arched a brow and smirked.

"If no one's bleeding, you're being downright docile."

Billy turned in his seat, angling his body to face Steve across the car.

"Docile."

"Sweet, even."

"Fuck you."

"Language." Steve warned, fighting back a laugh as Billy squinted at him from the passenger's seat. The silence only made it harder for him keep from cracking.

"How much longer until we get there?"

"Billy, we left less than an hour ago." Steve chuckled.

"It's Saturday."

"Yeah?"

"I had things I wanted to do today." Billy growled. "None of which

was drive a car-stealing asshole from Hawkins to the city to get a pat on the back from a bunch of dickhead donut eaters.”

“We eat donuts, Billy.”

“Christ—”

“Like, every day. Should probably stop getting them, actually.”

“Steve. Shut up.”

He let out the laugh that he’d been holding in, the sound bubbling up from his chest through his nose. After a second, he saw Billy shaking his head, a grin forming over a frown.

“Wanna get a bite to eat after we drop off this asshole?” Billy asked, his voice dropping low despite the casual air of his tone. Steve shrugged, hands tingling on the steering wheel.

“Eh, I’m not that hungry.”

Billy’s gaze was unrelenting.

“I’m starving.”

3. The Truce

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve reminisces about the origins of his partnership with Billy.

Notes for the Chapter:

Shout out to everyone who's left comments, chatted me up on tumblr, and left me prompts and encouragement. This one is for y'all.

With Billy, lunch time was 11:00am. Sharp. If Steve was lucky, they made it to 11:30 before Billy was too hungry to behave like a rational human being. But regardless of the time, they'd always wind up at the local diner. Every. Day. Sitting in their usual booth, nursing his usual turkey sandwich and chips, Steve found himself lost in thought. Billy was busy shoving a burger into his gob while Steve watched, remembering a time when he thought he didn't like Billy Hargrove. Remembering a time when he didn't care if the guy existed or not. Things had changed so much, it made Steve think back to what started it all. Back to the academy, years ago, the day he and Billy had first become partners.

They'd been paired up in training, making them both roll their eyes and grumble under their breath. They had come a long way since the fistfight at the Byers' house, but ultimately weren't friends. Billy had become tolerable towards 'the party' and even let up on Steve in gym. But they were *not* friends.

The training that day had been disarming suspects. In groups of two, recruits would practice taking a weapon from his partner, safely disarming them using various techniques, and then they would switch. It'd gone pretty simply. Billy was a little rougher than need be but Steve had anticipated that. He, in turn, had only used the necessary force to subdue his partner. Nothing more. It only seemed to make Billy rougher.

Then the commander had yelled, "Pat downs."

The pair was given a weapon from a selection and the other was told to find it on their person. Miss the weapon; fail the exercise.

Billy went first.

Steve tucked a small razor into his sock, careful to keep it from nicking his heel inside his shoe. When the whistle was blown, Billy roughly pinned him face-first to the wall, his hands going *everywhere*. Steve could smell the padded gym walls as he pressed his face into it, staring straight ahead, focusing on his breathing with all his might. Meanwhile, Billy grabbed and brushed and touched every inch of his body. The pair beside them finished, the successful recruit letting out a laugh while they high fived.

Billy got rougher.

Steve had to close his eyes to keep from being overwhelmed by the hands on him. Then, mercifully, Billy finally found the razor in Steve's sock. He snorted and Steve let out a sigh of utter and complete relief, body sagging against the mat. How he'd survived that, he wasn't sure. His heart was flying, pulse so loud in his ears.

Then it was his turn.

Looking away, Steve thought about all the good places to hide the razor, focused up. He'd never really confronted all the weird tension between himself and Billy. He'd always chalked it up to the awkwardness of having his face beat in by the guy. But what he'd felt during that pat down hadn't been awkwardness. It was heat. Want. Steve shook himself, attempting to get his head back into the game with deep breaths, willing his heart to slow. Then the whistle was blown and he turned around.

Billy was facing him, unlike the rest of the recruits who were facing the wall. Instantly Steve's palms were sweating. He was forced to grab Billy by the shoulders and turn him, pressing him into the mat.

He started with Billy's arms, patting down each before he brought them up, palms stacked on the back of Billy's head. Then he

progressed down Billy's back, following his spine and back up his sides. Steve spread his fingers to feel through Billy's thin t-shirt, searching for anything out of place. When he slipped around to Billy's chest, he carefully ignored both nipples and moved quickly over the guy's stomach, face warming. From there, Steve bent down, one hand still pinning Billy's hands behind his head, the other patting the outside of his thighs. He felt pockets and seams carefully to check for abnormal lumps or sharp edges. He looked inside both of Billy's shoes before he started up the opposite leg.

When he swept his hand into the inside of Billy's thigh, he froze, hand resting on a bulge against Billy's left leg. But it wasn't a razor. Steve's hand shot away and hurriedly swept the rest of his leg, moving as calmly as he could. But all the while, he couldn't concentrate, his palm burning with the memory of the hard ridge along Billy's thigh.

He didn't find the razor.

As the whistle rang out, Steve stepped back, humiliated and flustered. Billy turned, a grin wide on his face. Steve wanted to look away from the cocky smirk, but his pride refused to allow it.

"Harrington." The commander had barked and Steve had grabbed a handful of his freshly chopped hair, giving it an irritated tug.

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't successfully find the weapon on your suspect." The man stated the obvious; all of his classmates were watching as Steve shifted his weight from left foot to right.

"No, sir." He replied.

"Hargrove."

The command went unspoken. Billy opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue.

And there was the razor.

"Good work, son." The commander said with a small grin.

“Harrington, give me thirty.”

As Steve dropped to the floor and started in on his thirty push-ups, the class broke up for the afternoon, voices rising in conversation. But Billy didn't walk away. He stood over Steve, watching as he pounded out his punishment, grinding his teeth in fury. He'd allowed himself to get distracted. Hell, Billy had probably planned it all, just to throw him off. He pushed on the floor in anger, breathing hard, sweat beading on his forehead.

“Hey, Harrington.” Billy said, squatting down when he was almost done. Steve ground through the last five push-ups. “Wanna grab lunch?”

Steve had glanced up at Billy with an incredulous look on his face.

“You're joking, right?” He panted, coming back up onto his feet. Billy rose and shrugged.

“Could argue you owe me dinner, but I'll settle for lunch.”

Steve just stared, catching his breath. With a squint, he gestured between them.

“You do that on purpose? To mess me up?”

Billy snorted and licked his lips, looking around the room. When his eyes returned, Steve swallowed at the glint he saw in them.

“Don't know what you're talking about.”

Steve let out a harsh laugh.

“Whatever, man.” He started walking away, but suddenly a hand was on his wrist, gripping him tight.

“Eat lunch with me, Harrington. Jesus. Call it a truce.”

They met eyes. Steve's searched for any hint of a lie while Billy simply smiled. There was warmth in the guy's expression that Steve hadn't seen before, a sincerity that made his stomach squirm.

“Okay, fine.” He finally managed to murmur.

They got subs a couple blocks away, ordering and eating in odd silence. There was an occasional question about safe topics: parents, Max, then the obligatory 'why become a police officer?'

Billy revealed that he'd chosen the profession because of Hopper, which surprised the hell out of Steve. Mostly because it had been his reason as well. Billy didn't get into how he knew the Chief, or why he had such an effect on his choice, so Steve didn't push. He did, however, reveal his own reason. Hopper had become a sort of mentor to Steve. He glossed over the chaos and danger they had navigated together; but said that, ultimately, Hopper had told him that he needed more men like Steve on the force. That's all it had taken to put him on the path. A little encouragement and a sense of purpose. He was going to do something with his life besides end up working for his dad. He was going to protect people, maybe even save lives, like Hopper.

It wasn't until were leaving that Steve finally got up the nerve to ask what he wanted to ask. *Needed* to ask. He waited until they were walking down the sidewalk and passed the open mouth of an alley. Then he pounced. Grabbing Billy by the arm, he hauled him into the shadowed alley, pushing him up against the wall face-first.

“Shit! What the fuck—“

“Hands up.” Steve had ordered flatly, stepping away as Billy frowned in confusion at him from over his shoulder. Gradually his brow lifted, the scowl giving way to a look of surprise.

“Harrington.”

“Hands. Up.” Steve ordered again. Billy turned his head around, facing away, before his hands slowly rose. He intertwined his fingers, clasping his hands behind his head.

When Steve walked into Billy's back, he didn't feel the least bit nervous. He could see Billy's chest rising and falling faster over the

guy's shoulder, could hear the breath rush from his open mouth.

"You did it on purpose, right?" He asked into Billy's ear. The response was a chuckle.

"What do you think?"

"I think you did it on purpose. To mess me up."

"You're giving me too much credit." Billy snorted. "I'm not *that* talented."

"What does that mean?" Steve asked, giving Billy's back a little shove so the guy had to take a step forward to keep his balance, shoes scuffing on the cement.

"I mean I couldn't help it."

"How's that?" Steve growled, walking forward until Billy's chest was pressed into the brick wall, his face turned so Steve was staring into his eyes.

"Had my hands all over you, Harrington." He replied, pupils blown wide with lust. Pure, unhinged, lust. "I wanted you to know." He added in a softer voice. Steve blinked, watching the guy lick his bottom lip and bite it in his teeth.

"Know what, Hargrove?" Steve asked, his pulse rising.

"How much I liked it." Billy chose that precise moment to spin around, catching Steve off guard before he turned them both, pinning Steve's back to the bricks. For a moment they both simply panted, mouths inches away.

"What do ya say, partner?" Billy whispered, so close but not close enough. Steve leaned in but Billy kept him hanging, hovering just out of reach.

"To what?"

"Truce?" He asked, eyes fixed on Steve mouth.

“Fuck yeah.”

“Dude, what?” Billy snorted, throwing a wadded up napkin at Steve’s head. “Earth to asshole, come in asshole.”

“Shut up.” Steve muttered, rolling his eyes as his partner chewed his burger with a grin.

“What’s got you zoning like an idiot, Harrington? *Were you dropped as a child?*” He snorted at his own joke and Steve sighed.

He was never going to live that line down.

“Just thinking about our truce.” He answered, smirking as Billy suddenly stopped chewing. A mischievous grin crawled across his partner’s face.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Wanna take the rest to go?”

“Fuck yeah.”

Notes for the Chapter:

When Billy wants to go get lunch, sometimes he's not talking about lunch. Now you know. The previous chapters might read a little differently now...

4. The Call

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve gets a call and the day suddenly takes a turn.

Notes for the Chapter:

Bit of a short chapter this time but this idea came to me and I couldn't resist. thanks for reading!

Hawkins had one hospital. Built hundreds of years ago, by cavemen, the ancient building wasn't fit to house a flu patient. Anyone who had a lick of sense, and wasn't bleeding out in the back of an ambulance, was usually trucked to the next town over to a newer hospital built after the revolutionary war.

The only reason anyone showed up at Hawkins General was if things were bad.

When Steve got a phone call on a grey Monday morning, the moment he heard *Hawkins General* murmured over the line, his heart gave a little pang of fear.

"We might have a situation here." The nurse said softly into the phone, no doubt trying to shield her voice from being overheard. Steve nodded, as if she could see him before he remembered to reply.

"We'll be right there."

Billy was staring at him with a curious furrow in his brow, but his posture was loose and casual as he crossed his heels atop his desk. Forever the model of authority figure, his partner.

"That was Hawkins General." Steve said as he hung up, standing from his seat as he adjusted his belt. Something about the tone in the woman's voice had made him uneasy and Billy picked up on it in an instant. His expression shifted from curious to concerned as he whipped his legs down from his perch.

"What's going on?" He asked, rounding the desks as Steve wrestled

his black windbreaker back onto his body. It looked like it was going to rain, which didn't help the ominous swirling in his gut.

"They didn't say. Just said there might be a police situation with a patient."

Billy's posture straightened and he swallowed thickly, giving him a shallow nod.

"Right. I'm driving."

"No—"

"Come on, Miss Daisy. We're wasting time." He grumbled as he pushed past, grabbing the keys to the cruiser from Steve's desk.

Steve rubbed a hand over his forehead and sighed off the rest of an argument.

"At least *try* and sort of obey speed limit." He said as they filed out of the station. "I'd like to get there in one piece."

"Yes, *dear*."

When they arrived, they were met by a nurse. She was young but stood with authority as they approached. After a few casual greetings, Steve was relieved when she got right to the point.

"About an hour ago, a man brought his son in with a few broken ribs." The nurse worried the inside of her cheek before she opened a file and pulled out a photograph. "I took that when he arrived."

Steve took the polaroid in hand and winced. The boy's side was swollen and purple, hard to look at even for Steve. Billy stepped close to look over his shoulder and he felt his partner go very still, as if he was holding his breath.

"As you can see, the damage was...extensive." The nurse's tone wavered and she held out a hand for the photo, which Steve slowly returned. "The boy says he fell off his bike, but when we see injuries like this..."

“Where’s the father?” Billy interrupted in a gruff voice, his tone sending a bolt of fear down Steve’s spine. He caught his partner’s eye and nodded, placing a gentle hand on Billy’s shoulder.

“Bill...let’s hear what she has to say—“

“I know the rest.” Billy snapped, fidgeting away from Steve’s touch. “Did you keep the kid and his dad here?”

The nurse nodded, her throat working as she swallowed.

“The doctor told them we were waiting on x-rays. He’s had me record all of our observations during the boy’s examination and he also had me check for...” Her eyes lowered and she took a quick breath. “... signs of older injuries.”

“How old is the boy?” Steve asked softly, his eyes still locked on Billy’s profile. His partner refused to acknowledge his gaze, looking pointedly at the nurse.

“He’s six.”

The pain that sliced through Steve’s chest seemed to echo in Billy also, the two of them going silent. The nurse clutched the file to her chest, wrapping her arms around it.

“His name is Henry. He seems like a good kid—“

“Where.” was all Billy said. The nurse simply pointed down the hall and murmured 304 and Steve was charging after his partner, wishing like hell he’d let someone else answer the phone.

“Billy.” He called, trying his best to keep his voice down and catch Billy’s forearm in a hand. “Hey, let’s talk this through.”

“What’s there to talk about, Harrington?” Billy snapped, yanking his arm away when Steve tried to grab it. “I’m gonna arrest this asshole and dump his ass in prison where he can get *his* ribs kicked in.”

As they rounded the corner, Steve took advantage of an empty hallway and grabbed Billy by the shoulder, turning to pin him against a wall. His partner was pushing against him hold with rough hands,

but Steve held firm, bracing his forearm across Billy's broad chest.

"Get the fuck off me!"

"No." Steve ground out. "Not until you calm the hell down."

"Calm?" Billy hissed before his face broke out in a wide, chilling smile. "Oh, I'm plenty calm."

"What you are is ready to walk in and murder that guy." Steve growled, stepping so close he could feel the heat radiating through Billy's skin. "I get it, I'm pissed too, but you can't lose your head."

"You get it?" Billy scoffed. His arms lashed out, knocking Steve's hold loose. Then Billy was grabbing him by the jacket, crushing the windbreaker in his palms. "You have no idea, Harrington."

Steve simply breathed, palms resting softly on Billy's wrists.

"I think I do." Steve whispered. He held Billy's stare, open and waiting. "I know." His partner's brow lifted slowly. "I know."

"The hell you do." Billy released him with a grunt, eyes darting away as he huffed in anger. But the fire had burned out of his posture, the rage fading away.

Steve knew quite a bit, actually.

He knew about Neil Hargrove's reputation as a hard ass through passing comments by Billy and Max. He'd seen how Susan Hargrove looked away when Neil raised his voice in public. He'd seen the way Billy didn't meet his father's eye. Hell, he had even avoided it during their academy graduation ceremony, when Neil Hargrove had been beaming with pride. Billy's father had been all smiles and clapping his son on the back, the picture of proud dad. Steve had still seen the hesitation on Billy's face, the tight line his lips made when he smiled in thanks.

Steve could connect the dots easily enough.

"Let's do this by the book." He said gently, moving so he could look into his partner's stormy blue eyes. "We take him in, the city can file

charges, and he won't hurt the boy again."

Billy's gaze was glassy when he looked up at the ceiling, a nasty sneer on his face.

"He'll do it again." He muttered. "They always do it again."

"Not..." Steve reached out with a tentative hand, brushing his fingers over Billy's jaw. This kind of touch only passed between them behind closed doors, for obvious reasons, but he couldn't help himself but turn his partner's face to connect their eyes. To speak to him on another level. Not as a coworker, but a friend. "...if we do this right."

Steve felt the gentlest lean of Billy's face, the added weight in his palm warming him from head to toe. After a moment, Billy straightened.

"You lead." He finally murmured. "If I touch him—"

"I know." Steve smiled. "Bad cop Billy."

"Worse." Billy added with a sincere nod. "I'll rip his arms off."

"I don't doubt it." Steve sighed, stepping away. "I know you, Hargrove."

"Yeah." Billy stared at him from the wall, his face easing ever so slightly. Not a smile, but no longer a frown. "I guess you do."

Notes for the Chapter:

Driving Miss Daisy came out in '89 so it roughly matches my timeline...but I'm cutting it a *little* close. EHH, I've wanted Billy to say that for ages.

5. The Holidays

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve and Billy enjoy a little Christmas cheer.

Notes for the Chapter:

Yes, I wrote a sappy Christmas chapter.

“Get that away from me.”

“You *promised* Flo.”

“She’ll recover.”

“It’s got your name on it, idiot.”

Steve couldn’t help but snort at the glare on Billy’s face as he dangled the hat between them. The Santa hat looked just like all the others on heads around the room but the glitter green *BILLY* across the white band put it out from the rest. Steve pointed to his matching hat, complete with a glitter red *STEVE*, perched proudly on his head and Billy scowled deeper.

“I hate you.” He muttered. Steve took a step, flopping the hat on his partner’s chest.

“Deck the Halls, Hargrove.”

“I’ll deck something.”

“That’s the spirit.” Steve teased under his breath, clapping Billy on the shoulder. “Now put on the hat. Flo worked hard on this party.”

Looking around the room, Steve felt nothing but cheer at the festive decorations scattered about the station. Everyone was in the holiday spirit. Even Hopper was in good mood, his arm wrapped around Joyce as they mingled on the other side of the room.

They’d recently announced their engagement, which surprised

absolutely no one. The two had been inseparable for years. Everyone had seen the changes in Hopper. Jane had mended Hopper's wounded heart but Joyce had been the one to bring romantic, unyielding love back into Hopper's life. The result was a happier, healthier Chief of Police. Steve watched as the pair looked at each other, eyes locking with expressions of pure joy.

"Happy?" Billy nudged his arm and Steve turned.

"You..." Steve had to cover his mouth with a hand to keep from bursting into laughter. Billy didn't look particularly ridiculous but the irritated frown he wore had Steve itching to chuckle. Dressed in his blues, Billy looked the same as he did everyday. His blond, curly hair was tucked behind his ears and the dark hair that lined his jaw and mouth was trimmed neat and short, framing a pronounced glower. Even in a full pout and a cheap, silly Santa hat, Billy's eyes sparkled in the Christmas lights, eyelashes framing blue irises.

As Steve held back the impulse to bark out a laugh, breathing into his fist, he nodded. "You look so jolly."

"Shut up." Billy squinted. "I need a drink."

"You're in luck." Flo appeared at Steve's side, a little, clear plastic cup in each hand. "I need someone to start drinking this eggnog."

"I'll stick to water, thanks." Steve said with the kindest smile he could manage, staring at the white drink. He'd never been a fan of the stuff, despite the appeal of an alcoholic beverage designed specifically for getting tipsy during the holidays.

"More for me." Billy said with a cheesy grin, taking both cups from Flo's hands. "Thanks, sweetheart."

"Easy, big guy. You're my ride home." Steve muttered, eyeing Billy as he took a huge mouthful in a greedy gulp. Flo chuckled and gave Steve a little wink.

"It's not alcoholic." She whispered.

Billy froze.

“What?”

“I love what you did with the office this year.” Steve remarked, draping an arm over Flo’s shoulders and ignoring the horrified expression on Billy’s face. He didn’t miss the slow swallow and hidden wince. “Really brought out the Christmas spirit, didn’t it, Billy?”

Flo gave a little scoff and waved a hand.

“Steve Harrington, you’re a shameless sweet talker. Eat some food so I don’t have to box it up for you to take home. And Merry Christmas, boys.” She patted both of them fondly as they replied in kind, wishing her Happy Holidays as she wandered away.

Billy set down the eggnog the second she was out of sight.

“Jesus, what kind of sick bastard invented fake eggnog?”

Steve wrinkled his nose.

“The same sick bastard who invented actual eggnog, I imagine.”

Billy rolled his eyes.

“You’re a baby, Harrington.”

“Says the guy complaining about a Santa hat.” He shot back with an arched brow. Billy grinned, flashing his teeth.

“At least my hat isn’t ruining my hair.”

Steve crossed his arms to keep from involuntarily touching his head.

“Har. Har.” He said with a sneer.

“What’s funny? I’m serious.” Billy pointed, stepping into Steve’s space. “It looks like something died under that hat.” Steve tried not to blush as his partner brushed against his forearm and drew a line with a finger from Steve’s elbow to his wrist. It was a bold and shameless attempt to rile him.

“Yeah, okay. Asshole.” Steve whispered, his gaze flaring.

“Easy, pretty boy.” Billy breathed in a low hum, eyes darting over Steve’s shoulder before returning as goosebumps rose on Steve’s arms and his stomach warmed. *Pretty boy*. A nickname he rarely heard from Billy anymore. “Those bedroom eyes might cut this party short.”

Steve let out a rough laugh.

“My bedroom eyes?”

Billy faked a serious nod, straightening his hat.

“This is a work event, Harrington. Keep it professional.”

“You’ve *got* to be kidding me.” Steve dropped his arms, but smiled while Billy strut away. “You’re terrible.” Billy grinned over his shoulder.

“I know.”

Leave it to Billy Hargrove to spike the eggnog at a Christmas party in a police station. He’d mysteriously procured a bottle of rum and suddenly the station was buzzing, the bowl of nog vanishing faster than any of the food. Flo had threatened to drown Billy in the ruined drink but he’d won her over in the end, flashing a winning smile and sweeping her into his arms for a dance. He gave her one hell of a dance; his tall frame was pressed flush to the shorter woman’s, hands holding her close as they swayed to the King’s “Blue Christmas”.

It was a spectacle that led to pairs dancing all over the room. Even Joyce and Hopper were huddled together, moving to the beat. Joyce was tucked neatly into Hopper’s arms, all smiles. Steve couldn’t help but watch them all with a grin on his face, sipping his water.

Eartha Kitt began to croon “Santa Baby” and Steve shook his head as Billy dipped Flo back and made a show of holding her up in one arm. Joyce whispered something to Hopper then she was crossing the room, holding out a hand.

“Steve Harrington.” She said with a wide smile. “Dance with me.”

“Oh, that’s okay—“

“Come on.” She grabbed his hand, pulling him off the desk. Steve hesitantly took one of her hands and settled the other at the middle of her back as Hopper passed by with a wink.

“Watch those hands, kid.” He teased. Joyce laughed and shooed him away with a free hand before replacing it and looking up into Steve’s eyes. She was such a small woman; Steve had to bend his knees slightly to allow her hands to rest on his shoulders.

“How are Will and Jonathan?” The conversation was easy enough for Steve to start. He saw Joyce frequently enough that he knew most of the details.

Jonathan was in New York, doing what he could to keep his photography dreams alive while he worked at a paper. Nancy had gone with him to NYU and they were together still. Steve knew that the Wheelers didn’t know Nancy lived with Jonathan but that Joyce did. Of course, she was the one who supported them. She supported and loved them all. Besides, everyone in their group knew it was only a matter of time before the two were married. Time and money.

Will was going to school in Chicago, which Steve envied. He was studying art and excelling. The party had once gathered during the summer to visit and show up at a gallery opening, surprising the hell out of Will. His piece had been dark and a little difficult for Steve to understand but it had sold before the night ended. The kid had talent and had managed to turn his horrific childhood into a muse, according to Dustin. Steve was just glad to see Will happy. He just wanted to see all of them happy.

“They’re good.” Joyce replied softly, a little knowing smile wrinkling at the corners of her eyes. “They’re both great.”

Steve nodded and searched for anything else to ask about. But it had been years since he’d had a lengthy conversation with Joyce. Years since they’d slaughtered monsters and faced nightmares. Now topics were limited to such simple things, it seemed almost silly.

“How are you doing, sweetheart?” She gently prodded, touching his

jaw with the tips of her fingers. He met her eyes and sagged at the maternal affection beaming back at him. Joyce Byers was nearly more of a mother to him than his actual mom. It had once wounded him to realize that fact but now he embraced it. She would know him better than his mother ever would. She and Hopper would be there for him in ways that his parents could never hope to be.

“I’m doing good.” Steve smiled warmly, giving her hand a little squeeze. There was a lot in the look that he didn’t say but the nod from Joyce told him she understood. No more nightmares. No more sleepless nights.

He’d joined the police academy to help people, sure, but he’d also wanted to conquer his demons. Being a police officer didn’t teach him how to kill demodogs, but it did teach him that being afraid was part of being human. His fear didn’t hold him underwater anymore. He didn’t wake up covered in sweat and shaking with adrenaline. He’d learned to accept his trauma and use it to make himself a better cop.

“May I cut in?”

Steve was startled to realize Billy was standing beside them, eyes absolutely twinkling with mischief.

“Sure.” Steve offered Joyce’s hand but found himself being swept away by a rough pull on his bicep. Billy whisked him out of a laughing Joyce’s reach and grabbed one of his hands, draping an arm over the back of Steve’s shoulders. Charles Brown’s “Please Come Home for Christmas” set the rhythm slow and Billy swung them from side to side.

“Okay, this isn’t a good idea.” Steve hissed into his partner’s ear, his face burning.

“Why not?” Billy asked, cheeks rosy from far too much eggnog. “No one cares.”

Steve looked around the room. Not a single person was looking at them. Joyce and Hopper were back in each other’s arms, swaying gently like every other person in the room.

“Someone will notice...”

“I just swept Flo off her feet.” Billy wagged his eyebrows. “Your turn.”

“Billy—“

“I’m kidding.” His partner laughed with a genuine smile. “It’s just a little music, Harrington.” The added wink made Steve’s stomach flip.

“Just...behave.” Steve said softly, relaxing ever so slightly in Billy’s arms. His hand rested below Billy’s shoulder blades while his other hand started to sweat in Billy’s warm palm.

“Don’t I always?” Billy joked, a devilish smile lighting up his face. Steve relinquished a laugh and Billy led them around in a small circle, feet shuffling on the floor. For the entirety of the song they just danced. Steve kept his eyes down or watched other couples, envious of the small kisses and closeness they all shared. He and Billy were as far apart as possible despite Billy’s arm being wrapped around Steve’s back. He wanted to reel his partner in and trap the guy against him, press his nose into the curly hair sticking out from under the goofy hat on his head. The music smoothly transitioned to Sinatra’s “White Christmas” and Steve felt a lump form in his throat.

“Can we go for a drive later?” He whispered, shyly looking up into Billy’s eyes.

What he saw took his breath away. Billy was glowing.

“Sure, Harrington.” He replied gently, the hand on Steve’s back moving just a little to swirl his fingers in Steve’s shirt. “Always up for a drive.”

They hadn’t made out in a car since the academy. The whole thing had felt too juvenile after they’d graduated, the novelty eventually fading, and it was almost never comfortable. Steve’s BMW hadn’t offered much in terms of space and Billy’s Camaro was worse. But the back seat of the cruiser was a different story.

Billy had pulled them into a small parking lot, on the outskirts of

Hawkins proper, just after midnight. The black night and lack of street lighting made for the perfect cover while the cruiser itself deterred any curious eyes. They were alone. They could be themselves.

They could be together.

Sitting in the backseat of the cruiser, Steve tipped back his third beer, relishing the crisp tang on his tongue. The six-pack on the floor was full of empties, save the final two in their hands. Steve remembered when they could put away double that in the same amount of time. Years of adult responsibilities had changed that.

“You have any plans?” He asked, catching a glimpse of his hair in the fogged rearview mirror. Even through the metal divider, he could see it was a disaster. Billy loved pulling on his hair and Steve loved having it pulled, but it always looked comically terrible afterwards.

Billy hummed from beside him, throat working as he swallowed down a mouthful of his beer.

“Max comes home tomorrow. I’ll probably have to do dinner at the house at some point.”

Steve ran his pointer finger around the rim of his beer bottle. They hadn’t talked about Billy’s family in a little while but Steve could still sense the subject was raw.

“You?” Billy asked, nudging Steve’s shoulder. He shrugged.

“Dad said something about Florida.”

Billy whistled, shaking his head.

“Jesus, Florida for Christmas. Must be nice.” He took a long swig and groaned, leaning his head back on the seat. Steve stared down at his beer and his cheeks flushed warm.

“Yeah. I bet they’ll have a great time.”

Billy’s hair swished across the upholstery as he turned his head.

“Wait, you’re not going?”

Steve took a drink from his beer, ignoring the drum of his heart in his chest. In truth, his family hadn’t ever really put much value in being together during the holidays. Since he’d graduated high school, Steve had spent most of holidays with friends. Last year, he’d been a guest of the Henderson’s. When Dustin had found out Steve’s parents had booked a trip to Hawaii, the kid had *insisted* he spend the entire holiday with them. It had been one of the best Christmas’s Steve ever had but being alone didn’t bother Steve as much as it once had. Hearing the disbelief in Billy’s voice, however, brought a fresh bloom of pain to the surface.

“Nah.” He murmured, casually shrugging a shoulder. “Just me.”

Billy sat up so Steve could see his face, brows pulled together.

“And you were just going to sit home alone?”

His tone was angry and Steve sighed, rubbing a hand over his jaw.

“No, I’ll see probably Dustin—“

“You weren’t gonna tell me you’ll be alone for Christmas?” Billy’s frown dug deeper and Steve groaned, tossing his head back.

“I wasn’t *hiding* it.”

“Steve.”

Rolling his head, Steve found Billy’s eyes in the dark car and was shocked at the pain shining in them.

“I just...” Steve waved a hand. “It doesn’t bother me.”

“It bothers me.” Billy said roughly. With a toss of his head, he downed the last of his beer and dropped it into the pack on the floor. “Fuck, your parents are assholes.”

“Hey.” Steve protested weakly but the withering look on Billy’s face kept him from pushing further.

“They might not have slapped you around or called you a faggot but sometimes I think they’re worse than Neil.” He growled. Steve hid a flinch, the bitterness in Billy’s voice lancing him in the chest.

“They’re not cruel.” He whispered. Billy gave an angry snort and Steve leaned forward, propping his elbows on his knees. “At least they don’t mean to be.”

“Yeah well, that’s bullshit.” His partner hissed. Tipping his head back, Steve drained his beer and slipped it into the last slot of the pack.

“It’s fine.” He finally whispered. “I’m fine.”

Billy made a noise in the back of his throat and Steve dared to glance at him. His partner’s jaw was locked and his neck was flushed from anger, the flesh an obvious red even in the dim light.

“You’re an idiot.” Billy muttered, the words more of a sigh than a statement.

“Gee, thanks.” Steve managed to reply while he straightened his shirt and tucked the thing back into his pants. A big hand grabbed his hair and hauled him back and Steve let out a shocked gasp, throat going tight as he met Billy’s simmering eyes.

“You’re an idiot for thinking you were going to be alone.” His partner purred, his voice dropping so low Steve’s stomach fluttered and his heart skipped. The grip in his hair softened, smoothed out into a caress until Billy’s hand was cupping Steve’s jaw. Steve breathed in Billy’s cologne and the scent of beer and leaned into it, reaching to meet his open lips.

The hand at his jaw slid down to wrap around Steve’s neck, keeping him just out of reach.

“We’re doing Christmas at my place, Harrington.” Billy declared.

“Billy, you didn’t even get a tree.”

“Then I’ll get a dumb tree.”

Steve made a face.

“You’re going to get a tree... two days before Christmas?”

“I’ll cut down the one in the city square if I have to.” Billy growled, trailing his nose over Steve’s cheek. He swallowed to keep from moaning.

“What about dinner?” He asked, breathless.

“Chinese good enough for you, dear?” Billy chuckled into Steve’s pulse point, his words heating the skin. “Fa ra ra ra and all that.”

“My place is nicer.” Steve breathed with a grin. “And I have a bigger bed.”

Billy flashed a sinful smile.

“You gonna try and get me in bed?”

Steve chuckled, pushing against the hold on his throat. Billy’s palm didn’t budge.

“Maybe. If you’ve been a good boy.”

Billy hummed deep in the back of his throat and his lips teased the shell of Steve’s ear.

“Aren’t I always?”

Notes for the Chapter:

Wishing you all Happy Holidays and a fabulous New Year!

6. The End

Summary for the Chapter:

The pair pull over a speeder and things go wrong.

Notes for the Chapter:

Decided to finish this out to make room for new things. Been sitting on this chapter for a while. Hope you all enjoy and thanks for reading!

Billy hates giving out speeding tickets.

Sitting on the passenger's side of the cruiser, Steve is almost smug when they are *forced* to pull over a driver. Because even Billy couldn't ignore the extra twenty miles per hour on the speedometer, or the way the guy hadn't used a blinker at three turns.

"It's like the guy *wants* a fucking ticket." Billy griped, shaking his blond hair loose around his shoulders. Steve watched an errant curl hang off the side of Billy's forehead and tried not to think about how much he'd missed his partner's long hair.

"Maybe he's drunk." Steve murmured, more interested in Billy's face than the driver ahead. They were already stopped, lights flashing, and Billy was preoccupied with taking down the plate number, a scowl deep between his brows. After a moment, he looked up at Steve and gestured towards the stopped car.

"You gonna get out or what?"

Steve couldn't help but snort. Loudly.

"Since when does the *driver* just sit in the car while the passenger gets out?"

"Since now." Billy grumbles, the beginning of a grin twitching at the corners of his mouth. "I got the last one. Your turn."

"I'm sorry." Steve laughed, adjusting his body in the seat so he can

lean over the median, invade his partner's space. "Am I losing my mind? Because I'm pretty sure you haven't written a single ticket this year. Let alone the *last* time we pulled someone over."

Billy set down his notepad and grinned.

"Your word against mine, Harrington."

Steve scoffed in disbelief, but Billy made no move to get out of the car. In fact, the guy slouched back against the car door, leaning an elbow on the steering wheel.

"You're kidding me." Steve groaned. "Un-fucking-believable."

"I know, right?" Billy batted his eyelashes and Steve sighed. He couldn't help but bend to the dazzling smile on his partner's face.

"You owe me, shithead." He muttered, throwing open his door to step out into the cold.

"Oh, I'll think of something." Billy called after him before he slammed the door, shaking his head as he walked towards the driver's side of the stopped car. He kept one hand on his holster, the other hanging at his side as he approached.

The car is empty except for the driver, a middle-aged man with an unremarkable face. Dark hair, dark eyes, fair skin, and an expression of irritation on his face.

Steve was at the window when he saw the flash of metal from inside the car. He barely even had time to register what was happening before he was staring down the barrel of a gun.

I'm going to die.

The words rang out in his head at the same time as the shot, loud like a clap of thunder but so sharp his ears are ringing. Steve watched the gun jostle in the guy's hand, registered that it was firing at him, and then he fell.

Time seemed to stop.

As his body went into freefall, his weight plummeting towards the asphalt below, his mind went into overdrive. He thought about his parents. He thought about Hopper showing up on their doorstep, telling his mother that he'd been shot during a routine traffic stop. He saw his father, holding his mom upright as she wailed. Because she would wail, he knew. She loved a good show. But his dad, Steve knew he'd wait until later. He'd wait until his mother was good and numb from sleeping pills before he'd tackle the bottle of scotch in the den.

Steve thought of Dustin. He thought of how he was no longer a soft, round child but strong, smart man. Dustin would have to fly home from MIT to go to the funeral. He'd have take off school. Steve wondered if they let people do that sort of thing at a school like that. He wondered if Dustin would bring that girl he'd told Steve about. He'd told Steve he wasn't in love with her but that he really liked her.

Billy .

He felt an overwhelming sense of anguish when his mind finally honed in on Billy. Steve wondered if Billy would get a new partner. If he'd go with Hopper to tell Steve's parents. They liked Billy. They loved Billy. If anyone should be there, it should be him. He wondered if Billy would be angry. If he'd blame everyone or if he'd blame himself. He wondered what would happen to him.

Steve hit the ground on his right shoulder, a faint sense of pain radiating from the joint as heat bloomed out over the left side of his body. Steve vaguely wondered if he'd die quickly, or if he was going to choke and suffer. The fear of the latter rippled up his spine and his body jerked on the ground.

"HARRINGTON!"

Billy's voice sounded fuzzy in the back of his head, like someone shouting at him through glass. He blinked, seeing nothing but black. No, not black. Stars. He could see stars.

"STEVE!"

Steve wanted to reply but his head wouldn't catch up with his mouth. He gasped for air, the heat on his left side of his chest growing. Fear gripped him again and he choked. *Breathe!* His brain shrieked. He grappled with the tight grip around his chest and pulled down a ragged breath.

The air in his lungs felt like fire. His chest shuddered with pain but the hurt brought a gasp of more cold air into his lungs. The stars were burning out in his vision, fading into the sea of black surrounding them.

Then suddenly, he wasn't staring up at stars. He was staring up at Billy.

"Jesus Christ." His partner's hands were on his face, so warm on his cheeks. "Jesus Christ, Steve, stay with me."

The fear that gripped Steve's chest cranked down hard, making him claw for each breath with all his might. Billy was pale above him, his beautiful skin ashen with terror. Steve could see the truth on Billy's face: he was dying.

"Just take it easy, it'll be okay." Billy was whispering to him, hands so gentle as he knelt beside him. He was pressing on his chest, Steve realized. One of partner's hands was pushing hard while the other cradled his head. Bleeding. He was bleeding from his chest. "Hey, just breathe. It's okay." Billy sniffed and Steve stared up at him, a rattling sound grating loudly in his ears.

It took a moment for him to realize he was the one rattling.

Looking up at Billy, he listened to his own strained attempt to bring air into his lungs as his partner focused on his chest. Billy's face was so pale but there was sweat on his forehead, dripping down his cheeks.

Oh.

Steve watched helplessly as Billy silently cried. Tears rolled from the corners of his eyes, falling from his jaw. He'd never seen Billy cry. Never in the years they'd been partners.

Steve wheezed and Billy's eyes found his, shining so blue.

"Don't you fuckin' dare, Harrington." He hissed, his fingers digging into Steve's cheek. "The ambulance is on its way. You aren't dying tonight, asshole."

Steve would have laughed, if he'd had the air.

He felt his body panicking as he failed to bring oxygen into his lungs, gasping under Billy's hands.

"YOU SONOFABITCH." Billy was screaming at him, face turning red. "BREATHE." Steve's chest convulsed with pain and he gagged on a scream. He was moving, being pulled upright from the ground. The movement hurt like hell, but miraculously, air rushed into his chest and he sagged in relief. Billy's arms were strong around his body, holding him close. He could feel his partner's breath on his neck.

"Don't you fucking die." Billy was pleading with him, whispering in his temple. "I swear to god, I'll come after you, Harrington."

Steve's cheeks felt damp. Tears. He was weeping.

"You can't leave me." His partner was whispering, rocking him as Steve clawed to stay conscious. He was tired. He was so tired. "I love you, Steve. You hear me?"

It was the last thing Steve heard.

Waking up, it took a moment for Steve to realize something was amiss. His bedroom was not white. Billy's apartment barely had a lamp, so the bright lights overhead ruled his place out. He wasn't at home. He wasn't at Billy's. He blinked, trying to remember how the hell he'd wound up in a strange place, waking up completely disoriented.

The memories came back like a freight train. One moment, he was wondering how much he'd had to drink the night before. The next, he was grasping at the bedspread around him, his pulse shooting sky

high in horror.

“Billy.” He croaked out his partner’s name, remembering the tears and the awful fear in his voice. “Billy!” His throat burned like a flame as he shouted again.

“Hey.” His mother’s face appeared at his side, dark circles under her eyes. “Hey, it’s okay. You’re okay.” His father was beside her, concern lining their faces. He slowly put the piece together in his head. The harsh lights, the white walls, the IVs hanging overhead.

He was in a hospital. Not on a cold, black road. Not dying.

His heart seemed to stutter against his ribs, relief jamming the brakes on his panicked pulse. Above, his mother cooed at him and stroked his arm while his father looked on, expression composed despite the obvious exhaustion on his face.

“Mom.” Steve swallowed, mouth like sandpaper, and grimaced.

“Here.” His mother held up a plastic cup of water and guided a straw to his lips. He drank greedily, taking mouthfuls of the stuff down until the cup was empty. “I’ll get you more.”

“What happened?” He asked, his voice so much lower than normal. He didn’t sound like himself. He sounded like he’d aged ten years, ground to the bone. His dad put a soft hand on his wrist and gave it a tender squeeze.

“You’re okay.”

“No, what happened?” Steve asked again, clearing his throat to add emphasis to add weight to his tone. “Tell me—“

“Okay, okay.” His father’s lips made a hard line and he ran a hand through his hair. Thick hair, much like Steve’s but slowly fading to silver. “You were shot in the chest. Missed your heart by inches, but it did a number to your lung.”

Steve wheezed, remembering the sensation of drowning on nothing.

“You were in surgery for hours. You got through strong, kiddo.” His

dad tried to look proud but fear still lined his forehead. Hours. Steve sighed and let his head fall back on the pillow. His parents had waited outside an operating room for hours, wondering if he'd survive the night. His mother gave Steve a weak smile.

"Here, sweetheart." She put the straw back in his mouth but Steve only took a few sips before he tore his mouth away.

"What happened to the driver?"

His father glanced at his mother and a shudder raced down Steve's spine.

"They looked for him while you were in surgery." His father blinked away. "Billy caught up to him."

Billy.

He could still feel his partner's fingers in his cheek, holding his jaw as he screamed at him. Screamed and cried.

"Billy." Steve willed his arms to lift his body upright but a sharp jolt of pain licked up his left side. He grunted in frustration. "Is he okay? Where is he?"

"He's just fine, love. He was here a bit ago." His mother said, stroking a hand over Steve's cheek. "He went home to shower and change." She wrinkled her nose and attempted a playful smile. "He needed it. He was here for a long time."

Steve's heart ached. He knew exactly how Billy smelled after a long shift. Like sweat and coffee and cigarettes. Like Billy. The man he knew better than himself. The man who'd begged him to breathe.

"Mom." His voice cracked and Steve fought back tears. He loved his parents. He loved them so much. But his heart was crying out for someone else entirely. "Mom." His mother leaned down and stroked his hair, whispering softly into his forehead as tears prickled at the corners of his eyes.

"I know, sweetheart." She cradled him against her neck. Steve sagged from the warmth of her, the safety in her arms. "It's okay."

This time, Steve embraced unconsciousness and dreamt of stars.

His eyes opened when a bolt of pain ripped through his chest. Steve moaned and reached for the cause, his right hand groping blindly across gauze and bandages while his head reeled with confusion. Something grabbed his hand and pulled it away and he let out a small grunt of protest, pain surging. He blinked, seeing nothing but shadows in a dark room.

“I got you, just hold on.” Billy’s voice was like a caress in the darkness and Steve moaned, not in pain but in relief.

“Billy.” His hand flexed, gripping his partner’s hand as he fought to focus in the dimly lit room. The pain reared its ugly head and he grunted, arching his neck to keep from whimpering.

“Once sec, I’ll be back.”

“No.” He held onto the hand in his, clenching his teeth.

“Gotta get you more dope, partner.” Billy whispered. He could smell his cologne, his shampoo. He was close. Steve’s vision swam with strain but he could make out the shadow of Billy moving away from the bed. Then he could hear his voice, barking loudly in the hall.

No doubt putting the fear of god into some poor nurse.

When he stepped back inside, Billy turned on a light and Steve sunk into the mattress at the sight of him.

Billy looked like he’d been to war. His face was shadowed, his cheekbones and jaw harshly defined. His hair was freshly washed and un-styled, locks falling in chaotic curls around his ears. It was his eyes, however, that held Steve’s attention. They were so tired, so dull, it frightened him.

A nurse scurried past Billy where he stood in the doorway and gave Steve a quick look. After asking him some forgettable questions about his pain, and sticking a needle into his IV, she emptied a syringe of

something into his veins.

Steve was floating before she left the room.

A little smile was on Billy's lips when he crossed the room and sat down in the chair that had been placed at Steve's side. Where he'd been before, Steve realized, waiting for him to wake up. Billy was there, knees pressed against the edge of the mattress he was so close, a smirk on his face as Steve stared.

"Good shit?" He asked softly.

"Ohhhhh yeah." Steve groaned, his body numb in the best possible way. "Good fucking shit."

Billy let out a snort.

"Listen to you...cursing like a sailor, high as a kite. You should get shot more often, Harrington." His smile was playful but the warmth didn't reach his eyes. Steve scoffed and lolled his head back and forth, gazing at his partner with a grin.

"I've only got so many lives." He slurred, a breathy chuckle popping from his lips. "Monsters and mayhem and now a gunshot. I'm down to my last life."

Billy let out a half-hearted laugh before he looked down at his hands.

"Better save that one." He added softly. "Can't have you runnin' out."

The silence between them stretched on for minutes. Billy looked between his hands and Steve's bed, eyes never fully returning to his face. Steve didn't feel the need to say much of anything. He was content to just stare. And stare.

"You're beautiful."

He blurted the thought before his drugged up brain could remember to keep it contained. Billy glanced up with a surprised lift to his brow before it relaxed into an easy smile.

"You're high."

"I've always wanted to tell you that." Steve ignored the way Billy's gaze skirted away and his cheeks colored. "So beautiful."

"Steve—"

"I thought your face was going to be the last thing I saw." He continued, watching as Billy's expression caved in.

"Don't remind me." Rubbing his eyes on his palms, Billy sighed and Steve wondered if he was trying to scrub away the memories. Memories of cradling Steve's body while he bled out on the pavement. Billy looked up just as Steve's eyes started to tingle, tears threatening to fall. When one broke loose and tumbled down his cheek, Billy's face shifted from shock to fear and he moved to stand from the chair. But Steve waved him off.

"I'm okay."

Billy relaxed a little but stayed poised in the chair. Ready to pounce into action. Steve let out a watery laugh.

"When I was laying there, I thought of what would happen if I died. I went through it all in my head, like a checklist." Billy winced and Steve sniffed, wiping his face with a hand. "Thinking about my mom and my dad was hard enough. And Dustin, Jesus." Steve scoffed and looked at the ceiling to keep more tears from streaming from his eyes at the thought of Dustin. "But, to be honest, that wasn't what scared the hell out of me."

Billy was frozen in his seat and Steve knew that they were at a fork in the road. A pivotal moment.

"I was thinking about what would happen to you." Steve finished with a whisper. "I wondered if you'd get assigned a new partner. If you'd go see my parents. If you would stay in Hawkins." His chest shook from a sob and he had to look away. "I was worried about you."

He stared at a wall on the far side of the room, wishing with all his might that he could blame the drugs for the overwhelming emotion building inside him.

"I shot him." Billy's voice was rough when he spoke, breaking the silence. Steve turned his head. Billy had leaned over his knees, fingers speared in his hair. "Hopper and I hunted that asshole down and cornered him. All I could think about was how cold you were." Billy's fingers tightened against his scalp and Steve swallowed. "It was a clean shoot but... I went in there wanting to kill him."

Steve shuddered at the cold anger in his partner's tone. When Billy looked up, his eyes were simmering with rage, the kind that Steve knew came from a dark place deep inside him. A darkness that Steve could remember succumbing to on the floor of the Byers house. He had kept Billy even for so long, it pained him to see it surface now.

"If it was a clean shoot, you did the right thing." Steve shrugged his right shoulder. "I nearly died because of that asshole."

"Steve." Billy swallowed and looked down at his shoes. "You did die."

Steve could hear his heart beating in the thick silence that followed. Eventually, his partner looked up and sniffed, messing his hair with one hand. "In the ambulance, you flat-lined twice."

"Jesus." Steve breathed.

"Fuck that." Billy growled. "I was praying to all those fuckers and what that kept you alive was powered by a goddamn battery."

It took Steve a minute, but eventually he managed a small grin.

"You prayed, huh?"

Billy sighed and lifted a single brow.

"Yeah."

This time, he didn't look away. Billy kept his eyes focused on Steve's, let him just take him in.

"I wanted to say it back." Steve whispered. His partner blinked rapidly.

"Say what?"

“I love you.”

It was funny how easily the words came out. It was as if his fear of dying had broken down the artificial fear of Billy’s rejection. And the guy had said it first, after all.

Billy was still staring.

“I heard you.” Steve continued, glancing away. “At the end. Right before—”

“It should have been me.” Billy blurted. Steve frowned in confusion while his partner rubbed his hands over his face. “It was my turn and I made you get out—”

“Billy—”

“I should have been the one standing there—”

“That’s not—”

“I would have been the one he shot—”

“Hey.” Steve smacked a hand on the mattress. “Cut that shit out.” Billy glared at him but Steve pointed at his face. “Right fuckin’ now.”

“I should be the one in that bed.” Billy murmured. “It’s my fault.”

“You know what, fuck you.” Steve grunted, dropping his head back on his pillow.

“Fuck me?” Billy snarled, standing up so Steve was forced to see him out of the corner of his eye. Lifting his head, Steve returned his glare.

“Yeah, fuck you for taking that on. Like I’m not a fucking adult.”

His partner’s mouth snapped shut and he ground his molars.

“I could have fought you harder on your bullshit. But I didn’t. I got out of that car. I didn’t see the asshole pull a gun. My getting shot is on *me*, Hargrove. So fuck your guilt complex and fuck you.”

Billy swooped down on him so fast Steve was sure he was going to hit

him. Instead, his partner's hands were cupping his jaw, bringing him up off the pillow to press a hard, heated kiss on his lips.

He instantly forgot why he'd been so mad, melting into Billy's touch. Reaching out, he gripped Billy by the back of the neck to hold him there and tremble against him. Steve breathed him in while his fingers tangled in the curls at Billy's nape and Billy leaned down until they were so close Steve could feel the heat from his skin. The kiss seemed to linger endlessly, the two of them lost in the sheer need to just touch.

When Billy pulled away, he tucked his mouth in against Steve's temple.

"I love you." Pressing their foreheads together, Billy held onto him as Steve basked in the happiness fluttering in his stomach. "This shit scared the hell out of me too. Because when you were fucking bleeding all over me, I realized I'm nothing without you." Steve gripped the back of Billy's head harder, pulling him even closer until they shared each breath. "We're partners, Steve. In life." Steve met Billy's eyes and smiled at the joy sparking in them. "Think you can handle that?"

Steve smirked.

"Oh, I think I'll manage."

Author's Note:

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